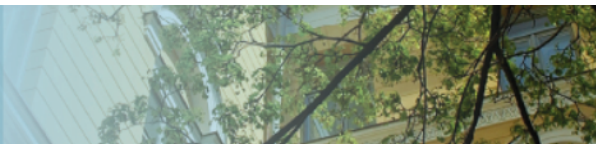


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How does museum planning influence the image of cities?

Case of selected institutions of contemporary art in Europe

The museum, as a place where artistic achievements of a nation are collected and presented, has always occupied a special position in the urban space of a city.

Disregarding the type of art which lies within the scope of interest of a given museum (ancient, modern, contemporary), a museum is a place for building and preserving identity.

Museums and institutions established for the presentation of art are located near main communication thoroughfares, at the meeting point of axes, in the vicinity of other buildings which perform state functions, in strict centres of cities or in areas attractive on account of their environment. Such institutions change the cities in a physical manner: a museum is entered into a specific urban layout, it manages a given building, but also exerts impact on its surroundings (access roads, green areas, sculptures in public space), influences social behaviour (the public space offered by a museum organises the free time of city dwellers), but also changes or improves the image of a city, becoming a part of its trademark.

In order to trace these changes, I selected six examples from the area of Western and Central Europe.

1. The case of Bilbao: a comprehensive approach

Bilbao, the capital of the Basque country in northern Spain, is an example of the largest, most spectacular and most effectively conducted revitalisation of a city. Its impact on other city centres was called the “Bilbao effect” and the impact of its museum icon – the “Guggenheim effect”. The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, opened in 1997, is the most widely discussed example of dependency of contemporary art and spatial planning and constitutes a model example of merging the building of the museum with the structure of the city.

From the point of view of culture, the Abandoibarra district, which lies over the river and which historically was a harbour district, is particularly important. Relocation of harbour activity enabled the establishment of architectural icons within its area and transformed it into a *hot spot of the city*.¹ *An unquestionable architectural gem*² of Bilbao is the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao. The General City Planning Scheme adopted in 1989 forecast the establishment of a museum in this district. Its aim was to create a symbol for cultural activity in the urban area. In 1991, the Basque government applied to Thomas Krens, director of the Salomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, with a proposal for participation in the city revitalisation plan. At that time, Krens was absorbed by the idea of global expansion of the Guggenheim collection (plans of establishing branches in Venice, Salzburg, Vienna, Tokyo and Moscow); therefore, the proposal met with favourable conditions³. The creator of the architectural design is the well-known and esteemed Frank O. Gehry. The cornerstone for construction was laid in 1993, and a ceremonious opening took place in 1997.

The museum is excellently incorporated into the urban space – it does not dominate, it does not overwhelm, but harmoniously undulates by the river bank. It reflects light coquettishly and banters with onlookers: it requires their mobility, it urges them to go around the building, because every step in any direction opens new perspectives. No two elements of the façade are identical; every point of view offers different aesthetic sensations. The building is like a flower that changes when the angle of the sun's rays is different or a fantastic ship that noiselessly docked at the base of the bridge. The height of the foyer is 55 m, yet the building does not exceed the line of the surrounding structures, due to the fact that it stands by the river bank below the level of the city (the difference in height is best exemplified by the bridge adjoining the museum connecting the river banks).

Communication with the museum was facilitated by the Zubi Zuri pedestrian bridge opened in 1997 which is approx. 200 m away from the museum. Its architecture, designed by Santiago Calatrava, resembles a white sail hovering over the water.

The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao is a masterpiece in itself. Works of art hidden under the titanium cover are less important. Beneath the external structure, the interior architecture is displayed (by no means neutral); the works of art presented here attract the visitors' attention at the very end.

2. The case of London: a museum for the new millennium

Tate Modern the London museum of contemporary art, was built on the southern bank of the Thames in an old brick building of a municipal power station constructed between 1947 and 1963, which the Swiss architectural team Herzog & de Meuron

adapted for the needs of the museum. The case of Tate Modern constitutes one of the largest success stories among museums of contemporary art in the world. According to “The Observer”, it is the most frequently visited museum of contemporary art in the world.⁴ It is an example of *adaptive reuse*, i.e. the *process of searching for a new life for old buildings*.⁵

The power station was closed down in 1981 due to an increase in oil prices. At that time, it turned out that other methods of obtaining energy were more profitable. At the end of the 1980s, people realised that Tate Gallery needed a new space for housing its collection in the Millbank district (after the opening of Tate Modern, the original location was called Tate Britain) and specifically its collection of international contemporary art. The building of the old power station was selected on account of its size, excellent architecture designed by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott and location. An architectural competition was organised, and in 1995, the machinery stored in the building was removed.⁶ In December 1996, Swiss architects opened their office in the building and commenced work on its adaptation for exhibition purposes according to their winning design. In May 2000, the museum was opened to visitors.

The adaptation did not violate the external structure of the historical building. Articulation of the walls was retained, as well as the 99 m chimney, which is just 15 m lower than the cathedral cupola on the opposite bank. The function changed from production to cultural. The museum contributed to the revival of the riverside district. The press continues to write about it, and it is a staple place for visiting London. It attracted developers to the less attractive bank of the Thames and forced establishment of a picturesque promenade over the river. The pedestrian bridge⁷ excellently joins

tourist cultural attractions: the museum, the Globe nearby Shakespeare theatre (which definitely benefited from the investments) and the cathedral.

The most recent attendance results (April 2006 – March 2007) list 5,235,000 visitors.⁸

Their huge number and the need for a new exhibition space made it necessary to extend the museum. In 2006, the Tate Modern 2 design was made, an extension structure made of glass, which is going to be ready in 2012 for the Olympic Games.

Tate Modern was not meant to participate in the transformation of the city's character like the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao; on a smaller scale, it was designed to revive the district and to offer a cultural attraction which was meant to draw millions of visitors to a place which, even though located centrally, had relatively small power of attraction.

3. The case of Warsaw: toying with symbols in the city centre

Warsaw, as the capital of the largest country in Central Europe, would like to get out of the shadow of the huge socialist Palace of Culture and Science (230 m) and create a symbol relevant for modern times. For now attention is drawn by the oval architecture of the shopping mall *Golden Terraces [Złote Tarasy]* opened in February 2007. The layout of the capital centre is going to be changed by the Museum of Modern Art, for which a plot of land was assigned with a surface area of 12,300 m² with the Palace and Marszałkowska Street, one of the main communication thoroughfares between the shopping malls. In the Rules and Regulations of the architectural competition, it was emphasised that:

The Museum will be a living place, where contemporary art pervades city life. Architecturally, the building of the Museum should be a formal and significant counterpoint to the Palace of Culture and its structure – a recognisable, new symbol of Warsaw. The Museum, along with the adjoining square and park, will become the most important public place in the revitalised centre of Warsaw.⁹

When the results of the competition were announced it turned out that the new symbol would be the design of Christian Kerez, a Swiss architect, which is lost in the space of Warsaw. Despite disputes and controversies, city authorities accepted the cubist structure of the building, and the architect is currently working on the detailed design. At present, the museum operates in a temporary location where it organises exhibitions, meetings and lectures on modern art.

The issue of the museum has been on the front pages of newspapers since the year 2005. The architectural competition and controversies related with it caused a general social debate (a public opinion research institute examined the Poles' attitude to the choice made by the competition jury and a poll among Internet users was conducted); a number of open meetings with people involved in the competition were held, presentations in the media were made and articles appeared in every-day and specialist press. The temperature of the discussion is related with the investment's significance: location in a strict city centre in the immediate vicinity of the Palace of Culture and Science and the pressing need for establishing such an institution in Poland (plans for establishing a museum go back to the year 1945).

4. The case of Krakow: revitalisation of the district

In 2004, within the framework of programme of the Minister of Culture, Waldemar Dąbrowski, entitled “Znaki Czasu”, the Małopolska Foundation for the Museum of Contemporary Art was established; its objective is the creation of an autonomous collection of contemporary art. At that time, serious discussions on the issue of establishing the Museum of Contemporary Art in Krakow commenced. The Province Marshall and the City Mayor became involved in the issue. After years of disputes regarding localisation, in December 2007, a decision was made that the museum would be established in the former “Emalia” Factory of Oscar Schindler in the Zabłocie district. The museum would share its location with a museum devoted to war-time Krakow (presenting Jewish, Polish and German Krakow, the history of Oscar Schindler and the motif of Righteous Among the Nations of the World¹⁰).

Establishment of the museum will be one of the elements of revitalisation of the neglected Zabłocie district, located on the opposite bank of the Vistula River with respect to the Main Market Square, yet in close vicinity to the centre and the Krakow trendy Kazimierz district. According to press reports, the *post-industrial district has a chance to become a new attraction of Krakow, “relieving” the touristically exploited old city*.¹¹ Cultural investments are aimed at changing its image and function. In one of the buildings of the “Emalia” factory, the Faculty of Architecture and Fine Arts of the Krakow Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski University College has been functioning for a couple of years. The institution that will complete the Vistula landscape of cultural institutions will be the Museum of Tadeusz Kantor, which is planned in the building of a former power station at Nadwiślańska Street in Podgórze. The currently destroyed and neglected district is becoming an alternative centre for Krakow culture.

The Museum of Contemporary Art will be an incunabulum for the new cultural district. It will be located in thirteen post-industrial buildings, and its main part will be hidden underground. The architectural competition announced by the authorities of Krakow in February 2007 was won by a workshop from Florence – Claudio Nardi, Leonard Mario Proli and Annalis Tronci. Their minimalist design interferes with the original architecture of the place and conducts a dialogue with the history and the environment. For several years, the museum has been the subject matter of public debates and disputes. Nobody questions the necessity of its establishment (it is not possible to overestimate the value of 4,000 m² for modern art that will be established here); however, there are different opinions with respect to the location and the fact that the exhibition area will be shared with a museum devoted to Jewish issues. The most common fears are connected with the fact that not everything will be “suitable” to be shown in the museum.

5. The case of Łódź: art in the centre of commerce

The oldest Central European museum of contemporary art – the Museum of Art in Łódź – has been having problems with its premises for a number of years. The current location allows for exhibiting only 5% of the collection, and the spatial disposition of the interior (the historical palace of Maurycy Poznański from the 19th century) does not befit the needs of modern art. Postulates with respect to new building were numerous, and there was one obstacle – money. Rescue for the museum’s needs was provided by an investment made by the French company Apsys in the area of the former textile factory of Izrael Poznański, which opened in 2006 under the name “Manufaktura”.

“Manufaktura” was established in the premises of Izrael Salmanowicz Poznański’s empire, the owner of the second largest enterprise in the city, dating back to the second half of the 19th century. It is a city within city. Due to the fact that Łódź does not have a market square in the traditional meaning (life is concentrated along Piotrowska Street, 4.2 km long), a trade, cultural and entertainment centre (the largest in Central and Eastern Europe) located over a surface area of 27 hectares in adapted factory buildings took over the functions of organising life in the city. There is a trade centre (the only one located in newly-built buildings), cafés, pubs, restaurants, discos, a bowling alley, a cinema, a regional museum and a public area with a fountain, benches and lanterns. This is the only municipal square in Łódź exclusively for pedestrians. The entire area of red-brick is illuminated at night by fantastic colours. In this public space, just like on a market square, life is concentrated: people come here, spend their free time, contemplate art (in 2006, a Sculpture Park was established here).

In a post-industrial building directly adjoining the trade centre a space was created for the museum of contemporary art. A permanent exhibition within the museum, which is a branch of the Museum of Art in Łódź was opened to the public in November 2008. The building was given to the Museum in 2005 by the investor and developer of “Manufaktura”.

Controversies may be raised by the neighbourhood. This is not an island or a district of museums or cultural institutions (as in Vienna – MuseumsQuartier or in Berlin – Museumsinsel), but a centre of popular entertainment, where high culture will be an “island”. The director of the Museum of Art answered these accusations in the press:

It is nothing unusual to locate such places in trade centres.¹² I am against alienating art and placing it in distant, ideally fenced-off enclaves. In Łódź, “Manufaktura” is considered a city centre which performs diverse functions. It has a commercial function; let it have a cultural function. Independence of art is realised not by location, but through the policy of running such institutions. It is enough not to surrender to the impact of commercialism.¹³

6. The case of Bucharest: free art in the palace of oppression

In 1984, construction of the House of the Republic was commenced in Bucharest; the building is commonly known as the Ceaușescu Palace. In 1989, Nicolae Ceaușescu was deposed, yet the Palace continued to be built until 1997. For the Romanians, it is a symbol of the control of the communist party over the citizens. In free Romania, it became the seat of the parliament. This is the second largest building in the world performing administrative functions (330,000 m²) and the highest building in Bucharest (86 m high and, at the same time, 92 m above the level of the ground). It was meant to be the central element of the communist city. The construction involved demolishing one-quarter of the city centre (including ten churches, three synagogues, historical buildings and streets). In this place, the Palace was established and the road leading to it – the Boulevard of Socialist Victory. For Romanians, this is a *non-healed wound, which they are desperately trying to ignore, despite its sinister presence*.¹⁴ In 2004, in the western wing of the building, the National Museum of Contemporary Art (MNAC) was opened.

Financial means for the museum were provided by the government; there was no public discussion on an alternative location, and there was no open competition for architectural design. The opening was made when the façade was still unfinished and the exhibition halls were empty, shortly before the approaching presidential and parliamentary elections.¹⁵

The museum has problems with attendance. Its location makes the inhabitants of Bucharest unwilling to visit it, and this does not facilitate artistic education in a country where contemporary art is not popular. The exhibitions focus on well-known international names, and the national aspect of contemporary art is ignored. The museum, instead of becoming open to the public, entrenches itself in a fortress more than is indicated by its architecture and social image.

7. Recapitulation

The currently established museums of contemporary art, similarly to national museums, museums of art, museums of history, regional museums and other venues with significant importance for the history of a nation and a state, are located in places that are important for urban space. They play an important role in re-formulating the functions of a city or a district (Bilbao, London, Krakow), they are an important constituent part of new urban complexes (Łódź), they organise cultural life in a district (Krakow, Bilbao) or shift the centre of gravity (Warsaw). They are not created in a void; the area surrounding them also becomes organised, new communication frontages are established and view axes (boulevards over the Thames and the bridge leading to Tate Modern, boulevards over the Nervión River with a bridge leading to Guggenheim Bilbao); the museum can also be included in a previously created concept (new

functions of buildings in “Manufaktura”). The Museum of Contemporary Art in Bucharest is a negative example with respect to location of contemporary art (the understanding and the significance of which has yet to be taught to the Romanian society) in the seat of the communist power apparatus; on the other hand, there is no other such significant location: symbolically, contemporary art found its place in the heart of the city, at the meeting point of viewing axes, in a governmental building (as in Washington, where the main museums are located along the *Mall*, the main belt of greenery, between the Washington Monument and the Capitol, including the National Gallery with a separate building housing the collection of contemporary art and the Hirshhorn Museum of Contemporary Art).

Institutions of contemporary art have always held an important function in Western European countries. In Central and Eastern Europe, the museum construction boom has been going on since the 1990s; it is meant to fill in the gaps created over the decades. Social interest in contemporary art is still not high, yet the location of museums (which are mostly public institutions) emphasises their significance.

Why do cities decide to change their image through institutions of contemporary art? And why does unpopular contemporary art have such powers of attraction? These questions are more valid with respect to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe rather than Western Europe. Here, there were almost no museums of contemporary art before 1989. Since the 1990s, individual countries have been making up for time lost with respect to culture: they are establishing collections of contemporary art, museums, exhibition centres and extending institutions which have so far suffered due to their small premises and outdated (or non-existent) infrastructure. Museums of

contemporary art are fashionable around the world; they evoke associations with modernity, youth, freshness and being up-to-date. The art which they present predestines architectural experiments. Their architecture frequently becomes a work of art – a sculpture in a public space. In these countries, contemporary art is not as popular as traditional art created before the 20th century, yet it often captures the media's attention on account of controversial subjects which it undertakes or through extravagant means of expression.

Post-communist societies still have to learn about contemporary art, and the spatial location and disposition of museums in cities is meant to assist them in this task; to interest, to intrigue, to attract, to force one to reflection and to become a part of the every-day landscape.

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¹ M. .A. Murzyn, *Kultura a rewitalizacja miasta. Przykład Bilbao*, "Rocznik Międzynarodowego Centrum Kultury" No. 11 (2002), p. 53.

² Ibidem.

³ Ibidem, V. Newhouse, *W stronę nowego muzeum*, p. 603 [in:] *Muzeum sztuki. Antologia*, ed. M. Popczyk, Krakow 2005.

⁴ D. Sudjic, *Power point*, "The Observer" May 1, 2005,
<http://arts.guardian.co.uk/features/story/0,,1473883,00.html> (viewing: July 2007).

⁵ *Old Buildings, New Uses. Part 2: Aikido Architecture*,
<http://architecture.about.com/library/weekly/aa050901b.htm> (viewing: July 2007).

⁶ <http://www.tate.org.uk/modern/building/history.htm> (viewing: March 2008),

<http://www.tate.org.uk/modern/building/construction.htm> (viewing: March 2008).

⁷ The first new bridge over the Thames since the construction of the Tower Bridge in 1894.

⁸ Tate Report 06/07 <http://www.tate.org.uk/about/tatereport/2007/audience/attendancefigures.htm> (viewing: March 2008).

⁹ Rules and Regulations of the competition for an architectural design concept for the building of the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, Warsaw 2006.

¹⁰ *Rachunek sumienia byłego pełnomocnika*, T. Handzlik talks to Janusz Sepioł, “Gazeta Wyborcza – Kraków” December 4, 2007 <http://miasta.gazeta.pl/krakow/1,35796,4733685.html> (viewing: March 2008).

¹¹ T. Ogiński, *Włoskie miasto sztuki w Krakowie*, “Architektura” No. 10 (2007), p. 24.

¹² It is possible to quote, e.g. Rijksmuseum Amsterdam Schiphol – a branch of Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam at the airport terminal opened in December 2002.

¹³ A. Zgierska, *Czy sztuka może przenieść się do Manufaktury*, “Gazeta Polska” July 11, 2007.

¹⁴ C. Albu, *Problematics of Postcolonial Dislocation In the Case of the National Museum of Contemporary Art. in Bucharest*, speech presented at the 32nd Congress of CIHA in Melbourne, January 13-16, 2008.

¹⁵ Ibidem.